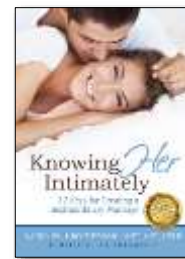


# EMOTIONAL CONNECTION ASSESSMENT

## 20 Characteristics of Living at a “40” on a 0 to 60 Scale

From [Knowing HER Intimately: 12 Keys for Creating a Sextraordinary Marriage](#) - Chapter 3 "Tenderness" (pgs. 68-76)

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Living at a “40” emotionally on that 0 to 60 scale embodies many of the characteristics one might think of regarding couples with really good, happy marriages. Here are 20 key ingredients that make up such a relationship: respect, trust, love, like, appreciation, selflessness, making your spouse a priority, responsiveness, positivity, acceptance, tenderness, affection, honesty, openness, vulnerability, safety, compassion, friendship, admiration, and attention. Rate yourself, and then your spouse, in each area for an honest self-assessment of how you’re currently doing. Record your responses in your Sexual Self-Discovery Journal. This will give you an idea of what areas to work on in your relationship.

On a scale of 0 (poor) to 10 (excellent), rate how you think you and your spouse are doing in each of the following areas. Have your spouse do the same, from his perspective. (For the full description of each characteristics, review pages 68-76 in Chapter 3 of *Knowing HER Intimately*.)

1. **Respect.** Relationships based on mutual respect are those where couples work as partners and love and honor each other. As much as possible, by consulting with and taking counsel from each other, they work as a team. When couples respect each other, they listen to and value each other. They allow each other to think, feel, and be different and can even disagree without it affecting the emotional connection. Respect requires that you consciously listen to understand your spouse. Balancing self-respect with spouse-respect is necessary in mutually respectful marriages. Spouses are not only attentive and respectful to the other, but also to themselves and their own boundaries. *How well do you show respect to your spouse? How well does your spouse show respect to you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Trust.** Trust in the relationship lets you know that the other is there for you and has your back. You know you can depend on them to follow through and do what they say they will do. Trust is the authentic sense that you are safe with your spouse—emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Trust is strengthened when spouses are there for each other, especially in times of anxiety and need. Added emotional bonding occurs when you feel your spouse is there to support you—particularly when you are under duress or are feeling vulnerable. Imagine how these women felt about trusting their husbands sexually when they didn’t feel like they could depend on them emotionally or socially. For a woman to be able to let go within lovemaking, she needs to have a deep and abiding trust in her husband—inside the bedroom and out. Trust must come before Touch, or the relationship can easily get out of balance and weaken. If things have happened in the relationship that have affected the level of trust, then those things will need to be addressed and resolved in order to create a trusting foundation so necessary in marriage. *How well do you trust your spouse? How well does your spouse trust you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Love.** Love is an action. Love is a choice. Love is a decision to think, speak, and act in loving ways even if you may not “feel” like it at times. Love—the feeling— may come and go but deciding to act in loving ways must be a constant, if you are truly committed to the covenant of marriage. And you don’t have to wait around for loving feelings to show up if they’ve faded. It’s much more empowering to choose to love, rather than being dependent on what you may be feeling or how the other is behaving. Love is doing things for each other. It’s putting your spouse and their wants, needs, and opinions ahead of your own at times. Love doesn’t mean you let others walk on you, or take advantage of your kindness or goodness, though. Ultimately, we’re looking for unconditional love.

It's the sense of being loved despite our weaknesses. It's being allowed to be imperfect. Unconditional love is the epitome of being "fully known"—warts and all—and still being loved and accepted. *How well do you "love" your spouse? How well does your spouse "love" you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

4. **Like.** Liking your spouse is almost a step up from love. To like your spouse means that they do a bunch of the things you like or appreciate. Someone can love their spouse, because they are their spouse, but really dislike how their spouse treats them, for instance. This "like" factor is a huge, almost intangible characteristic of the emotional climate in marriage, which fuels the desire to be intimate. I have often told clients that I, like most women, may not really feel like having sex at times, but because I like my husband so much, it is much easier for me to make that mental decision to go there anyway. *How well do you "like" your spouse? How well does your spouse "like" you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

5. **Appreciation.** One of the assignments I most often give couples is to start expressing their appreciation for each other more frequently. Sometimes the words don't get heard or are overlooked. Invariably, a husband or wife may feel unappreciated by their spouse. You can change that. With the help of technology, it is quick and easy to send a simple text expressing gratitude for the many positive things you could focus on about your spouse. You may not be able to change how your spouse shows appreciation, but you can focus on yourself, and how you could be more expressive of grateful feelings towards your spouse. An overall attitude of gratitude will do wonders for the loving emotional climate in the marriage. *How appreciative are you? How appreciative is your spouse?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

6. **Selflessness.** This one is a biggie! It is through the maturing process of personal growth and development that we turn from self-centeredness into a more other-oriented state of selflessness. This is necessary for oneness in marriage. Selflessness is the ability to exercise self-discipline and restraint and put your spouse's wants and needs ahead of your own. Selflessness can only be done well from a healthy, solid "self"—from a full cup, not an empty bucket. Otherwise the more naturally selfless person often gets taken advantage of. Selflessness only works well in a healthy, balanced relationship. I have quite a few clients who are dealing with things like manipulation, addiction, and narcissism in their relationships. In circumstances like that, the focus needs to be on maintaining healthy boundaries and requiring respect, rather than selflessly giving in to endless, unhealthy, and inappropriate demands. In healthy relationships, there's a balance of selflessness. Externally imposed boundaries are not needed in healthy relationships, because both individuals have healthy internal boundaries and natural respect for each other. Self-focus is in equal proportion with spouse-focus. If not, resentment grows, weakening the relationship. Both spouses need to make sacrifices for the other in a mutual give and take. *How selfless are you? How selfless is your spouse? How often do you do something for your spouse that you know they would like even if it's a little inconvenient for you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

7. **Priority.** A divorce lawyer shared that divorces she sees are not so much about the standard "sex" or "financial issues." She observed that the spouses simply weren't making each other a priority anymore. One or the other didn't feel important. Their needs weren't being met. They felt disregarded, misunderstood, and discounted by their spouse. Over and over she'd hear one of them say that a spouse's needs and requests were ridiculous. One spouse was often simply unwilling to stretch to meet the other's needs. Making your spouse a priority may mean getting off work in time to have dinner together as a family. Making your spouse a priority may mean making sex a priority over household duties. Making your spouse a priority, in whatever way that means to them, cannot be understated. When your spouse is your highest priority (next to God), your marriage can flourish. *How well do you make your spouse your priority? How well does your spouse make you their priority?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

8. **Responsiveness.** According to decades of research on couples, Dr. John Gottman tells us that one of the main factors in happy, long-term marriages is that couples respond positively to each other's requests or "bids for connection." These could be large or small, verbal or nonverbal. Responding positively means you "turn toward" your spouse rather than "turn away." Like loving our spouse in their own love language, these positive responses to a spouse's "bids for connection" are deposits into our spouse's emotional bank account. Encompassing other characteristics like trust, selflessness, and making our spouse a priority, we all want a positive response to the questions: Do I matter to you? Are you there for me? Can I count on you to be there for me? *How responsive are you in your relationship? How responsive is your spouse in your relationship?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

9. **Positivity.** Couples might have a lot of good things going on in their marriage, but if one or both of them focuses on the negative, it makes it difficult for marriages to thrive or partners to feel close. Positivity in your marriage means you assume the best and look for the good in your spouse by focusing on things to appreciate in each other. Positivity is a form of faith. It's believing that you are each doing your best, have good intentions, and are both looking for things that prove your positive beliefs. What we focus on, we tend to get more of. When we focus on and reflect the good, we get more of it. *How positive are you in your relationship? How positive is your spouse in your relationship?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Acceptance.** It can be pretty scary for a spouse to risk opening themselves up to the other emotionally, spiritually, or sexually, then find that they are then rejected. Acceptance in marriage sends an overall message that says, "I know you. I love you—warts and all. I realize you aren't perfect, but I love and accept you anyway." Like the couple in the opening story, acceptance means you don't need things to always go your way. Your spouse's way is good and okay, too. A state of acceptance, or unconditional love, is the path that most often leads to spouses making needed changes in themselves to create an even better marriage relationship. *How well do you accept your spouse unconditionally? How well does your spouse accept you unconditionally?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

11. **Tenderness.** Tenderness is being soft, kind, warm, and approachable in your interactions with each other. It's the little kindnesses in a relationship that really count. Like the couple in the opening story, when we are unkind with our spouse, we can stop, apologize, and instead express tender feelings of love. Tenderness flows best from a softened and humble heart. If pride is an issue in your marriage, it will need to be rooted out. *How much tenderness do you show your spouse? How much tenderness does your spouse show you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

12. **Affection.** Without loving touch, the emotional environment in marriage gets pretty empty and cold. So many couples get into the sexual dimension of marriage and leave the affectionate aspects far behind. Women are especially hungry for affectionate touch, for its own sake. This lays a foundation for more intimately affectionate touching. Affection in marriage means that spouses make a point to touch each other in fun, soft, and loving ways as a regular part of their relationship. *How affectionate are you with your spouse? How affectionate is your spouse with you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

13. **Honesty.** Honesty and transparency are crucial to the foundation of trust in marriage. Transparency prevents distrust. Keeping secrets of any kind—big or small—is generally a weakening agent in marriage. Not doing anything you'd be ashamed of certainly makes honesty easier. Steering clear of secrecy, and the shame that follows, takes the buzz out of the forbidden and instead builds trust and transparency. Honesty means that you can count on your

spouse to compassionately tell you the truth, even if the truth might be painful, or create negative consequences for either person. Honesty, with kindness, is key. *How honest are you with your spouse? How honest is your spouse with you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

- 14. Openness.** Openness is a willingness to be honest about who you really are and a willingness to express or show all parts of the self. Confiding in each other, as husband and wife, is what openness looks like. When was the last time you confided something even a little anxiety-inducing to your spouse? Openness necessitates keeping your emotional walls down and your heart softened. Openness is a willingness to see things another way, like trying to see things from your spouse's perspective, and being open to the possibility of their way being as right or as valuable as yours. *How open are you with your spouse? How open is your spouse with you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

- 15. Vulnerability.** Openness and vulnerability refer to that "in-to-me-see" concept. Vulnerability is a willingness to share your tender, sensitive, or even upsetting thoughts and feelings. Self-disclosure, where you are so deeply and fully known, is a big part of what builds emotional bonding and connection. Couples must be willing to allow themselves to be fully seen and fully accessible—even the vulnerable parts of the self. Instead of responding with easier emotions like anger or frustration, couples are willing to expose their softer side where pain, sadness, and fears reside. Unfortunately, many couples have a history where accumulated hurts often build a strong emotional wall to protect themselves. *How willing are you to be vulnerable with your spouse? How willing is your spouse to be vulnerable with you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

- 16. Safety.** Mental, emotional, and physical safety are pre-requisites for women to be open and willing to make themselves vulnerable—especially sexually. If a spouse doesn't feel safe emotionally or physically, they will be in fight, flight, or freeze mode much of the time. This will not only affect their ability to relax and respond sexually but will also make it difficult for them to even communicate effectively. Brain studies show that in women, physical and emotional safety is inseparably connected with sex. Women's brains naturally pair sexual cues with questions of safety and security. Sex is a riskier, more vulnerable endeavor for women. They are smaller, weaker, naked, and often on their backs in a vulnerable position. Women unconsciously ask themselves how sure they are about you. They wonder if they can trust you with their heart and their body. Being emotionally safe for your spouse means being open and accepting of what they have to say, even if you don't agree with or like it. *How safe does your spouse feel with you? How safe do you feel with your spouse?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

- 17. Compassion.** Compassion is the ability to respond with understanding and love, instead of criticism or judgment. Compassion is charity instead of contempt. A close relative of compassion is empathy. Empathy is the ability to feel what your spouse is feeling, and to see from their point of view. Empathy and compassion allow you to read, or tune into your spouse, and respond with kindness. This allows you to understand where your spouse is at emotionally, and what they may be feeling or experiencing. This requires a healthy degree of self-awareness and selflessness to be able to set aside your own needs and step outside yourself and see how something may be impacting your spouse instead. *How well do you show compassion towards your spouse? How well does your spouse show compassion towards you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

- 18. Friendship.** The richness of having your spouse as your best friend and cheerleader cannot be overstated in building a strong foundation for fantastic lovemaking. The warm companionship of friendship includes a genuine interest in the life and well-being of the other. It includes doing and saying thoughtful things. I've seen many couples where they show little interest in what's important to the other. Friendship requires letting go of selfishness, so everything isn't about you. In addition to being genuinely interested in your spouse, and being their devoted

cheerleader, friendship includes a mutual sharing of each other's thoughts and feelings. *How often do you do something nice for your spouse, just because? How good of a friend are you to your spouse? How good of a friend is your spouse to you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

**19. *Admiration.*** For admiration, I always think of “that look” in a person’s eyes that says, “I like who you are. I think you’re pretty great!” Remember the concept of “gentle eyes” discussed in Chapter 2 - “Thoughts.” Admiration requires that you not only love, but actually “like” your spouse. Admiration involves a willingness to focus on the strengths of our spouse and to think only thoughts that are encouraging and affirming. Admiration is the outward manifestation of loving, positive thoughts about your spouse. *How well do you admire your spouse? How well does your spouse admire you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

**20. *Attention.*** Couples that neglect each other and spend much of their time, energy and attention elsewhere will find the emotional bank account in their marriage lacking. Giving each other attention can be little things like phone calls or texts throughout the day. It might be a kiss and a hug when coming together after being apart. Paying attention is how you get good at reading and understanding your spouse, and tuning into them, so you can get better at connecting with them. It also means listening and showing the respect of giving your undivided attention when your spouse is talking to you. That means putting aside your phone, TV remote, video game controller, or the laundry. It is hard not to be distracted these days. All couples (and families) can benefit from an hour or two of planned “technology-free” time every day. Paying attention to your spouse may mean you need to set aside scheduled time where neither has to compete with texts, email, apps, or video games. The message you are sending by spending time on your phone may be inhibiting the very intimate relationship you desire. *How well do you pay attention to your spouse? How well does your spouse pay attention to you?*

RATING: You \_\_\_\_\_ Your Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

By rating yourself and your spouse in each of these areas, you can hopefully see where to focus your attention on making your marriage better. We’re talking primarily to or about women here. Yet, this dimension of tenderness/ thoughtfulness/ trust is one where a husband can do the most to help change the sexual dynamics in the marriage.